

# A LETTER

To  
The PASTORS  
And PROFESSORS  
Of The MISSOURI SYNOD

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
LIBRARY  
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

From a committee appointed by the  
President of the Norwegian Synod.

33001



Mankato, Minn.,

April 3, 1939.

Dear Brother:

We respectfully invite your consideration of this letter and the accompanying booklet, Union, Unity, and Unionism.

—I—

ON November 22nd, 1938, the following letter was addressed to the Missouri Synod through its president, Dr. Behnken:

To the Venerable Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States,

The Rev. J. W. Behnken, D. D., President.

Dear Brethren:

The undersigned committee, having been appointed for this purpose by the president of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Rev. H. Ingebritson, has studied "the doctrinal basis for future church fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church." As a synod we owe much to our brethren of the Missouri Synod, and we pray that we may never forget that debt. We may well say that we rejoice in that debt, since it has played an important part in our present possession and enjoyment of an unconditioned Gospel, which we hold in common with our brethren of the Synodical Conference.

In the documents agreed upon by the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church we, however, find statements which disturb our rejoicing, and we fear for our dear brethren that they, in their eagerness to bring the Gospel to others, are in danger of giving that Gospel away. A true giving of the Gospel can only enrich the giver; but there is a giving by which we ourselves lose the gift, offending both God and men, and disturbing the unity of the Church. We could not count ourselves as true brethren if we did not voice our fearsome concern at this critical time on the following points:

—3—

1. In dealing with a body such as the American Lutheran Church, a first duty would seem to be an ever-present consciousness of its unionistic spirit. Further proof of this spirit need not be adduced than its membership in the American Lutheran Conference. A double set of documents cannot possibly be an assurance of unity of faith with such a body, the more so when antitheses are lacking; for each statement can then be viewed in the light of the other, affording each party an opportunity to continue on its own course.

2. We are furthermore convinced that the documents, as they stand, do not offer sufficient protection against the leaven of error which the American Lutheran Church has harbored these many years. No additional assurances or explanations on the part of individuals or committees will avail here, since the official documents will ever remain as the evidence and last court of appeal when the question of confession is raised. To those official documents we shall be held, and we owe it to God and men to let that confession be clear and independent of conflicting explanations.

3. Finally, we cannot consider the matters of the secret lodge, unionism, and the like so unimportant that they may be relegated to the field of practice and reserved for future discussion, as if they do not belong in the field of doctrine. With the fathers, we are convinced that according to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessional writings Christian practice must harmonize with Christian doctrine. A church which tolerates a loose practice thereby reveals that "different spirit" which disrupts the unity of the Church. Our Missouri brethren would have been justified in withholding any declaration of doctrinal unity until assurances and statements had been confirmed by consistent church discipline as proof of unity in spirit and in truth.

Our fears on the above points have, we are convinced, been fully justified by the action of the Sandusky meeting of the American Lutheran Church as well as by the attitude of the representatives of the American Lutheran Church at the Racine convention of the American Lutheran Conference. Whatever evidence of agreement our Missouri brethren may have found in the report of their Intersynodical Committee may now seriously be questioned in view of the plain declaration of intention on the part of the American Lutheran Church to continue its connections in the American Lutheran Conference. So far as the other constituent members of the American Lutheran Conference are concerned, surely nothing less should be demanded than a plain and unequivocal retraction of errors, a retraction which the American Lutheran Church

evidently does not find it necessary to demand for continued fellowship in the Conference.

"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer."

Yours in Christ,

Chr. Anderson, Chairman

N. A. Madson, Secretary

H. M. Tjernagel

S. C. Ylvisaker

November 22, 1938.

Representatives of our synod met with the union committee of the Missouri Synod, February 16, 17, 1939, at St. Louis, Missouri, and presented our "fearsome concern" regarding the present union movement.

We would gladly leave it at that, if we could but feel assured that we had thereby discharged our duty to our brethren in faith and to the God of our salvation, in this critical matter. But we have no such assurance. Therefore, brotherly love constrains us to send you this letter and the enclosed pamphlet.

We bear no malice toward individuals or Synods. We would with great rejoicing join in altar and pulpit fellowship, in federation, or in a merger of Synods, to which the spirit of the following words could be truthfully applied:

"We speak the truth, when we assure you, that this Convention in Ft. Wayne reminded one of that picture of the Church, which the saintly Luke sketches in the words: 'The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul' (Acts 4: 32). It was not a matter of first establishing unity, much less of producing the appearance of unity from without by all sorts of forced joint resolutions and formulas, but of giving expression to the already existing unity. With joy those present recognized, that not the counsels of men and church politics, but true unity of faith and confession had brought them together, so that the inner unity appeared also outwardly through the bond of peace. It did, indeed, seem that there was justification for it when the enemies of (confessional) fidelity declared disdainfully that such fidelity calls forth only division; but God, who requires nothing from His stewards but that they be found faithful, has helped hitherto

that now everyone must recognize that fidelity to His Holy Word does not separate but truly unites." (Walther in *Der Luheraner*, concerning a preliminary meeting before the organization of the Synodical Conference which was held at Ft. Wayne, November 14-16, 1871.)

Having undertaken to speak to you by means of this letter, we frankly state at the outset our belief, that the Missouri Synod is now and has during the past few years been carried by the same current and driven by the same winds which sent the old Norwegian Synod on the rocks more than twenty years ago.

By the grace of God, we of the present Norwegian Synod, with painful memories of the catastrophe of 1912 and following years, have so far steered clear of that current. We have not dared lift our eyes from the Chart—Rom. 16, 17; Titus 3, 10; I Tim. 6, 3-5,—nor have we been persuaded that I Peter 3, 15 directs us to enter that current; i. e., doctrinal negotiations **by means of inter-synodical committees** with a view to bringing about unity of doctrine between Synods that have been in serious and mutually acknowledged doctrinal disagreement for decades.

Because of this our stand, we have been suspected of having lost faith in the power of the Word. However, our confession on this score is none other than it was three years ago:

"We acknowledge one, and only one, truly unifying influence and power in matters both of doctrine and of practice, namely the Word of God; and only one God-pleasing procedure in striving for unity: That 'the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God lead holy lives according to it'." Theses II, U., U., & U.

In 1936 our synod adopted and published in its convention report a set of six theses "expressing the principles which must guide us in seeking to effect" fellowship with other Lutheran bodies. We fully believe that our synod gave expression to Scriptural principles, and thus ran true to the orthodox spirit of the Missouri Synod and of the Synodical Conference. We invite your careful study of these theses with the added essays as found enclosed with this letter.

In regard to the American Lutheran Church, it is no mere accusation but a simple statement of fact, when we say: The American Lutheran Church has since its first year of existence been unionistic, it was unionistic during its Sandusky Convention (1938), and it is unionistic today. Need we prove this to anyone who knows what unionism is and who is acquainted with the history of the American Lutheran Church?

Read in this connection: **Walther and the Church**, lines 8-13 on page 21.

"Indifference to the doctrines taught in Scripture is a characteristic of unionism, the spirit of compromise between truth and error its breath of life. Therefore unionism and loyalty to God's Word cannot stand together, and Walther, the loyal liege of Scripture, spurned the advances of unionists."

It is, therefore, our conviction today as it was on November 22, that our Missouri brethren would have been justified in withholding and should have withheld, any declaration of doctrinal unity, however strong the assurances and however correct the declarations of the American Lutheran Church colloquents, until these assurances and declarations had been confirmed by consistent practice and church discipline throughout the synod, as proof of sincerity and of unity with Missouri in spirit and in truth.

There are also other weighty reasons why the St. Louis Convention should not have resolved:

"2. That Synod declare that the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod, together with the Declaration of the representatives of the American Lutheran Church and the provisions of this entire report of Committee No. 16 now being read and with Synod's actions thereupon, be regarded as the doctrinal basis for future church-fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church." St. Louis Report, p. 231.

It is not our purpose to enter into a detailed and full discussion of the above **fourfold** "basis for future church-fellowship". But we have reason to believe that the following comparisons and deductions are worthy of careful study:

**A. L. C. Declaration:** "Having carefully discussed with representatives of the Hon. Synod of Missouri, in a number of meetings, and on the basis of the Minneapolis Theses, the Chicago Theses, and the Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod, the points of doctrine that have been in controversy between us or concerning which a suspicion of departure from the true doctrine had arisen,\* we now summarize what according to our conviction is the result of our deliberation in the following statements."

**Opgjor, § 4:** "Since, however, during the doctrinal controversy among us, words and expressions have been used—**rightly** or **wrongly** attributed to one party or the other—which seemed to the other side a denial of the Confession of the Church or to lead to such denial, we have agreed to reject etc., etc....."

To what extent and in what instances did our fathers carry on strife on mere **suspicion** of departure from the true doctrine? Did they fight what **merely seemed** to lead, but did not actually lead, to denial of the Confessions? To us it



is quite evident that the phrase "suspicion of departure" in the **Declaration** and the "seemed to the other side" in **Opgjor** are begotten of the same spirit, a spirit which deems it unnecessary to list and retract errors.

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A. L. C. Declaration I, a. "The Bible (that is, the canonical books of the Old and New Testament) is the Word of God, His permanent revelation, aside from which, until Christ's return in glory, no other is to be expected.

b. The Bible consists of a number of separate books, written at various times, on various occasions, and for various purposes. Their authors were living, thinking personalities, each endowed by the Creator with an individuality of his own and each having his peculiar style, his own manner of presentation, using at times even various sources at hand, Num. 21:14; Josh. 10:13; Luke 1:1-4. Nevertheless by virtue of inspiration, i. e., the unique operation of the Holy Spirit, 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21, by which He supplied to the holy writers contents and the fitting word, 1 Cor. 2:12, 13, the separate books of the Bible constitute an organic whole without contradiction and error, John 10:35, and are rightly called the Word of God."

**Brief Statement:** "1. We teach the Holy Scriptures differ from all other books in the world in that they are the Word of God. They are the Word of God because the holy men of God who wrote the Scriptures wrote only that which the Holy Ghost communicated to them by inspiration, 2 Tim. 3, 16; 2 Pet. 1, 21. We teach also that the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures is not a so-called "theological deduction," but that it is taught by direct statements of the Scriptures, 2 Tim. 3, 16; John 10, 35; Rom. 3, 2; 1 Cor. 2, 13. Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10, 35." Read also paragraphs 2 and 3.

Why does the Declaration insert the clause "until Christ's return in glory"? Will there be additional revelation then? Do Lutherans who are not millennialists have such expectations?

Why does the Declaration avoid using the time honored term **verbal-inspiration** which through strife has assumed confessional importance among conservative Lutherans?

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A. L. C. Declaration, II a:  
"To this end He also purposes to justify those who have come to faith, to preserve them etc., etc....."

Brief Statement, 17: "Holy Scripture sums up all its teachings regarding the love of God to the world of sinners, regarding the salvation wrought by Christ, and regarding faith in Christ as the only way to obtain salvation, in the article of justification. Scripture teaches that God has already declared the whole world to be righteous in Christ, Rom. 7, 19; 2 Cor. 5, 18-21; Rom. 4, 25; that therefore not for the sake of their good works, but without the works of the Law, by grace, for Christ's sake, He justifies, that is, accounts as righteous, all those who believe in Christ, that is, believe, accept, and rely on, the fact that for Christ's sake their sins are forgiven ....."

In the first column above we have the age-old false doctrine of justification **post fidem**, in the second column the much-maligned but true Scriptural doctrine of justification **per fidem**. We cannot interpret the first column more charitably,—as a slip or as faulty construction,—because one of the American Lutheran Church colloquents, Dr. M. Reu, has later made this statement:

"It (the Bible) now became to him (Luther) the message of God's grace, of His saving righteousness and forgiveness, of redemption and eternal life for all who believe." See *The Cresset*, February, '39, p. 25. Please read the sentence in its context.

**A. L. C. Declaration, III:** "In connection with the doctrine of the Church the question debated was whether it is permissible to speak of a visible side of the Church when defining its essence. We declare that to do so is not a false doctrine if by this visible side nothing else is meant than the use of the means of grace."

**Brief Statement, 25:** "Since it is by faith in the Gospel alone that men become members of the Christian Church, and since this faith cannot be seen by men, but is known to God alone, 1 Kings 8, 39; Acts 1, 24; 2 Tim. 2, 19, therefore the Christian Church on earth is invisible, Luke 17, 20, and will remain invisible till Judgment Day, Col. 3, 3.4. In our day some Lutherans speak of two sides of the Church, taking the means of grace to be its 'visible side.' It is true, the means of grace are necessarily related to the Church, seeing that the Church is created and preserved through them. But the means of grace are not for that reason a part of the Church; for the Church in the proper sense of the word consists only of believers, Eph. 2, 19. 20; Acts 5, 14."

Why do the American Lutheran Church Colloquents desire to perpetuate the old **Iowa** absurdity of speaking of a visible side of an invisible thing so long as there is a perfectly good confessional term which expresses what they say they wish to have understood by said expression? To **tolerate** such an expression is one thing, but to give it **formal** sanction, as was done at St. Louis, is quite another. Let whomsoever will use Walther in defense or in excuse of such action,—we will not. And why not? "Lest we abet the notion that the Christian Church in the proper sense of the term is an external institution, we shall continue to call the means of grace the 'marks' of the Church. . . ." **Brief Statement, § 25.**

A. L. C. Declaration, I: ".....  
until Christ's return in glory....."

A. L. C. Declaration, VI, A,  
".....the return of Christ, the  
resurrection of the dead, the final  
Judgment....."

A. L. C. Declaration, VI, A,  
1: ".....the return of Christ....."

A. L. C. Declaration, VI, A,  
2: ".....until the return of  
Christ....."

A. L. C. Declaration, VI, A,  
3: ".....until the return of  
Christ....."

Committee 16, b. 4: "It (the  
Declaration) demands of those  
who place the thousand years in  
the future that they profess the  
truth that the Church on earth,  
until the return of Christ for judg-  
ment, will continue to be a king-  
dom of the cross and that all  
Christians should be prepared for  
the coming of Christ at any mo-  
ment."

Here we note that Committee 16 in a summary has closed the door against millennialism by its term "until the return of Christ for judgment" while the Declaration itself has clearly left it open by consistently separating the return of Christ from the final judgment.

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Sandusky Convention: "Re-  
solved: 2. That we declare the  
Brief Statement of the Missouri  
Synod, together with the Declara-  
tion of our commissioners, a suffi-  
cient doctrinal basis for Church  
fellowship between the Missouri  
Synod and the American Lutheran  
Church." ..(Lutheran.. Standard,  
November 12, 1938.)

St. Louis Convention: "Re-  
solved: 2. That Synod declare  
that the Brief Statement of the  
Missouri Synod, together with the  
Declaration of the representatives  
of the American Lutheran Church  
and the provisions of this entire  
report of Committee No. 16 now  
being read and with Synod's ac-  
tions thereupon, be regarded as  
the doctrinal basis for future  
church-fellowship between the  
Missouri Synod and the American  
Lutheran Church." (1938 Con-  
vention Report.)

A comparison of the two resolutions indicates clearly that a plank deliberately laid at St. Louis is rejected at Sandusky by being ignored. In view of the fact that the two resolutions differ so materially, it is pertinent to ask: What is in reality the status of the Missouri Synod-American Lutheran Church union or fellowship movement today?

Lutheran Standard (October 29, 1938): "In his greetings to our Church, Dr. Gullixson called attention to the fact that both the Norwegian Lutheran Church and our American Lutheran Church are the result of mergers and that because of this these two bodies have 'unique histories in the unfolding process of Lutheran history in America.' In the process of their merging both bodies, declared Dr. Gullixson, learned that the giving up of names of independent existence as separate synods is 'not an agony unto dissolution but unto more vigorous life'. President Gullixson referred to the prominent part played by the Norwegian Lutheran Church and our own body in the formation of the American Lutheran Conference, which, he declared, deserves to be named, 'The Needed Agency in the Unfolding of Lutheran Destinies in America.' In the midst of a world in transiency in both country and city, the distinguished head of the American Lutheran Conference declared that the Lutheran Church has the duty and responsibility of helping to build America into the nation she is to be and invoked God's richest blessing and immediate guidance upon our deliberations in the convention.

"In his response, President Poppen asked that our thanks be conveyed to Dr. J. A. Aasgaard, president of the Norwegian Luth-

Committee 16, a: "It is with great joy that we note that in the chief difficulty which separated our Synod from the constituent bodies of the American Lutheran Church, the doctrine of predestination, unanimity has been reached and that false teachings held by some Lutheran teachers have been repudiated. Concerning agreement in this doctrine the sainted Dr. F. Pieper declared thirty-five years ago in his *Die Grunddifferentz in der Lehre von der Bekehrung und Gnadenwahl*, p. 28: 'If unanimity in this point can be attained, that is, if from the heart we refrain from seeking a rational answer to the question *Cur alii prae aliis?* Why some rather than others (are elected), this is a sign that we are truly of one spirit. . .'" (Mo. S. 1938 Report.)

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eran Church, for the greeting which he sent through Dr. Gullixson and he assured Dr. Gullixson as president of the American Lutheran Conference that what he had said about the possibilities of fruitful cooperation in the Conference states our own convictions in that regard. 'The work of the American Lutheran Conference,' affirmed President Poppen, 'has just well begun, and we say that with full awareness of the implications. We are not saying Farewell to you or your Synod or the American Lutheran Conference, but *Auf Wiedersehen!*'" (Quoted from *January Quartalschrift*)

And so the rejoicing of Committee No. 16 is turned to grief and lament in the heart of every loyal and doctrinally faithful pupil and admirer of Dr. F. Pieper, for *intuitu fidei* is still safely entrenched in the Opgjor (Madison Agreement) of the Norwegian Lutheran Church, and thereby in the American Lutheran Conference, to which President Poppen of the American Lutheran Church does not say **farewell** but **Auf Wiedersehen**.

—III—

## THE AMERICAN LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

As further evidence of the spirit that is endangering conservative Lutheranism, we submit two articles, the first from "**Folkebladet**" and the second from the December 1938 issue of **The Bond**:

Folkebladet is the Norwegian organ of The Lutheran Free Church, one of the constituent church bodies of the American Lutheran Conference. In its issue of November 23 of this year, a lengthy editorial appears under the title, "The American Lutheran Conference".

After giving some of the more formal news items regarding the recent American Lutheran Conference convention held in Racine, Wisconsin, November 8-11, the editorial enters upon a very illuminating discussion of various subjects. A number of pastors of the Norwegian Synod have felt it to be a duty to our brethren of the Missouri Synod to make this editorial accessible to them in an English translation. We have made an effort to keep close to the original, even at the expense of good English. The translation as it here follows was sent to the College of Presidents of the Missouri Synod in December, 1938.

## Report of the Committee on Lutheran Union Addressed to the Clergy of the Missouri Synod

DEAR FATHERS AND BRETHREN:

Because it is more than a year ago since our Synod, at its late St. Louis convention, passed the momentous resolutions dealing with the question of fellowship between the American Lutheran Church and our Synod, it is proper that our Committee on Lutheran Union should inform you on the present status of negotiations. We first submit a mere enumeration of pertinent events.

As the church-papers have informed you, the A. L. C., at its convention in Sandusky, O., last October, accepted the *Brief Statement* and the *American Lutheran Church Declaration* as a doctrinal basis for church-fellowship. The American Lutheran Conference, to which the American Lutheran Church belongs, at its meeting in Racine, Wis., in November, appointed a committee which is to work for the uniting of Lutherans.

Your Committee met the commissioners of the A. L. C. in a one-day session on January 2 of this year. On February 9 the President of our Synod, Dr. J. W. Behnken, addressed a circular letter to our clergy, dealing chiefly with the matter of joint conferences of A. L. C. and Missouri Synod pastors. In March came the announcement that an agreement on controverted points had been reached by the A. L. C. and the U. L. C. A. commissions, the topics touched on in the agreement being the doctrine of inspiration, lodgery, and unionism. (The paragraphs referring to lodgery and unionism had been adopted before the 1938 conventions.) A brief, unofficial meeting of two representatives of the A. L. C. commission and of several members of our committee took place soon thereafter for the purpose of ascertaining how the paragraph on the inspiration of the Scriptures in the agreement between the A. L. C. and the U. L. C. A. commissioners was to be understood. In the mean time the President of our Synod informed our sister synods in the Synodical Conference, of which the Wisconsin and the Norwegian synods are particularly interested, on the action of our body at its 1938 convention. A meeting with representatives of the synod of our Norwegian brethren was held in February and with representatives of the Wisconsin Synod in April.

(It will now be necessary to dwell on particulars.) There are several things in the Sandusky resolutions which have aroused misgivings and which require explanation. We refer to statements saying that the *Brief Statement* of our Synod, viewed in the light of the *Declaration*, is not in contradiction to the Minneapolis Theses, that the American

Lutheran Church will not leave the American Lutheran Conference, and that agreement in all non-fundamental doctrines is neither necessary nor possible. In the January 2 meeting the commissioners of the A. L. C. told us that the sentence "We are not willing to give up membership in the American Lutheran Conference" is a conditional one, depending on developments in the American Lutheran Conference. They submitted this explanation (to us) in writing, in a paragraph which had been drafted during the noon recess. On the other points we enumerated they promised to give us a written explanation likewise. (We received these explanations in the course of time. While they clear up some matters, they are not in every respect satisfactory to us and require further discussion. To the list of things concerning which we made inquiry belongs the statement in the American Lutheran Church Declaration, to which many brethren have drawn our attention, that God purposes to justify those that have come to faith. The American Lutheran Church commissioners have assured us that this sentence, which speaks of subjective justification, is not meant to place an interval of time between the acceptance of the merits of Christ by faith and the justifying judgment of God. However, we hope that in addition they will give us the declaration many brethren are asking for, namely, that they accept fully the Scriptural teaching of objective justification.

At our meeting on January 2 the A. L. C. commissioners at once declared their willingness to discuss with us again the non-fundamental doctrinal points on which our Synod has instructed us to seek full agreement with the A. L. C. commissioners. In fact, they expected that the meeting would largely be devoted to a consideration of these points. Because we thought it necessary to speak of the items in the Sandusky resolutions mentioned above, there was little time left for a thorough scrutiny of these non-fundamental matters. Their consideration had to be postponed to a later date. Owing to circumstances beyond our control we cannot hold a meeting with the A. L. C. representatives till the end of September.

The news that the A. L. C. commission dealing with the U. L. C. A. representatives (in part a different commission from that dealing with our committee) reached an agreement with the U. L. C. A. commissioners on Inspiration filled us with amazement. If the paragraphs of agreement were satisfactory, we all should rejoice. As it is, they are not adequate. This is true likewise of the paragraphs dealing with unionism and lodgery. While the agreement undoubtedly represents a step in the direction of conservative Lutheranism on the part of the U. L. C. A., we do not see how it could receive the sanction of our



church-body as a satisfactory basis on the points covered. From the above it is evident that there is still much work to be done before it can be said that the Missouri Synod is ready for the establishing of church-fellowship with the A. L. C. A warning is in place both against undue optimism and gloomy pessimism.

What is most cheering in the situation is that joint conferences of the A. L. C. and the Missouri Synod pastors are regularly held at a number of places for the purpose of reaching unanimity in doctrine. Not a few reports have reached us speaking of helpful discussions. From several sections, however, there have come reports of an opposite nature, some men of the A. L. C. taking, for instance, an indefensible attitude toward the Holy Scriptures. If there is to be the establishment of church-fellowship, not only committees, but the pastors and the congregations of both bodies have to be in doctrinal agreement. For that reason these joint conferences play a most important role. We herewith request all conferences whose members hold intersynodical meetings with A. L. C. pastors to send us reports of these meetings. Kindly mail these reports to the chairman.

It may render a service to many brethren if we state that the words in the Sandusky resolution in which the *Brief Statement* is spoken of "as viewed in the light of the *Declaration*" have a certain justification with respect to one point which is not touched on in the *Brief Statement*. In the *Brief Statement*, for one reason or other, nothing is said about the attitude of our Synod with respect to "irresistible grace." Everybody who knows our literature is aware that we have always rejected the Calvinistic tenet which teaches irresistible grace. We have to tell A. L. C. men with whom we confer that this omission was not intentional and that our Church certainly will be very glad to adopt a resolution in which its rejection of the tenet of irresistible grace is expressly stated.

Our discussion with the brethren of the Norwegian Synod consisted chiefly in explaining the meaning of the A. L. C. *Declaration*. The discussions were not concluded but are to be continued this fall. In spite of this fact the committee of the Norwegian brethren circularized our clergy. We regret that in their circular they did not refrain from voicing suspicions and casting aspersions, which cannot do the cause of the truth any good. But we urge all our pastors to weigh objectively what is stated by the brethren and to take to heart especially their repeated warnings against unionism. The brethren of the Wisconsin Synod voiced largely the same views as the Norwegian brethren. Some of their criticisms of the action of our Synod have appeared in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*

of April and July of this year. A careful reading of the articles in question does not convince us that our Synod took a wrong course in 1938. We fail to see, for instance, that the statement in the *Quartalschrift* is justified which ascribes the following view to A. L. C. theologians: "In non-fundamentals the theologians should have liberty to propound differing views without laying themselves open to the charge of disturbing the unity of faith or breaking the ties of church-fellowship." The critic in the *Quartalschrift* overlooks that the A. L. C. Declaration accepts what the *Brief Statement* says on the absolute authority of the Word of God, an authority which covers non-fundamental as well as fundamental doctrines. In this connection, when reviewing the course of our Synod, it must not be forgotten that its action was taken before the Sandusky resolutions were passed.

As far as the U. L. C. A. is concerned, we can merely report that we have held no meeting with the U. L. C. A. commissioners since our 1938 convention. At the present writing we have no reason to believe that such a meeting will take place in the near future.

Finally, we wish to say that we note with sorrow the misunderstanding which obtains and is voiced in certain circles with respect to the attitude and work of your Committee. That we pray and labor for the establishing of church-fellowship with the A. L. C. on a Scriptural basis is declared to be a unionistic course. In certain circles it is forgotten that our fathers always deplored the lamentable divisions of the Lutheran Church (*die traurige Zerrissenheit der lutherischen Kirche*) and that they by no means looked upon such a situation as ideal. In these circles the warnings of the Apostle Paul against the existence and making of schisms and divisions are ignored, and the only texts quoted and considered are those stressing loyalty to the Scriptures and avoidance of heretics. While we by no means wish to lose sight of the latter texts, we cannot endorse a one-sided course, which in stressing one Scriptural truth disregards the other.

That we in our doctrines have a most precious heritage; that we must keep this heritage and transmit it to our children unimpaired; that we owe it to others to acquaint them with these treasures to the best of our ability; that we must labor and pray for the acceptance of these treasures by many others, especially by those who are nearest to us denominationally, — these are truths which, we hope, our Synod will not forget.

In the name of the Committee on Lutheran Union

July 12, 1939

W. ARNDT, *Chairman*

F. H. BRUNN, *Secretary*

## THE QUESTION OF FELLOWSHIP AGAIN

The question of pulpit and altar fellowship came up again this year. Two years ago at the meeting in Columbus, Ohio, little was seen or heard of that. But since then The American Lutheran Church, one of the constituent bodies of The American Lutheran Conference, has considered the question of closer relations with the Missouri Synod and the United Lutheran Church, and that put new life into the question again. It seemed that The American Church and Missouri had come closer to each other, and that fellowship between the two was not an impossibility. The distance from the United Lutheran Church was about the same. While there seems to be doctrinal agreement with that church, there is that in the way in the case of the United that it is too friendly over against the secret societies. Between Missouri and the United there is as yet quite a considerable distance. The American Church stands reaching the hand out to both but leans toward Missouri.

The Augustana Synod has for many years had fellowship with the United, and will remain standing thus. It stands at a greater distance from Missouri than The American Church, but is almost entirely with the United and would gladly get the United into the Conference. The Norwegian Lutheran Church is somewhat divided. The Synod trend or the Synod element within this church leans toward Missouri and would hardly have anything against going together with that church organization; but there are others in the Norwegian Church that have misgivings. The Norwegian Church can, we believe, be said to be in that same relation to the United.

The Danish Church is passive, but in general friendly to union; however it leans more to the United than to Missouri.

## THE LUTHERAN FREE-CHURCH AND THE QUESTION OF FELLOWSHIP

The Lutheran Free-Church has no great interest in this question and the doctrinal discussions related thereto.

Among the reasons the following may be cited:

That, for one thing, it is **wasted effort**. It knows that even if a kind of agreement on paper could be reached, it would be at the expense of individual opinion. The contracting parties may indeed in some way agree on a set of theses, but they prefer to understand these, each in his own way; they take their precautions and make their reservations. They stand where they stood just the same. Doctrinal agreements that are reached by means of colloquies, so often result from external pres-

sure, that it almost becomes a rule. But no one gives up anything. The whole thing gets to be a kind of opportunism which in reality closely approaches the hypocritical. The contracting parties may, perhaps, not be conscious of this at the outset, but it shows up later. The more doctrine is discussed, the more does the conviction of the correctness of one's own position deepen, and it thus leads away from the purpose in view.

In the second place, doctrinal disputations are entirely unnecessary. The difference that there may be between Lutherans in interpretations of individual doctrinal points, is so trivial as compared with that upon which they agree, that it is unnecessary to make any ado about it, it can at most have academic interest without practical value. It is after all mostly the understanding of obscure questions that is involved, questions that no one here in time can definitely settle anyway.

Thirdly, the discussion of such questions usually only leads to a division between pastor and congregation. It becomes an exhibition of learning and of a deeper insight than common people can be supposed to have. What the learned pastors and professors are discussing is beyond the understanding of the people of the congregation, and the theses that are formulated are not at all understood by the people of the congregation. As a rule technical training is required to be able to grasp them. The congregations must then believe that which the learned have established whether they can understand it or not.

A certain aversion has grown into the consciousness of the Free-Church people against doctrinal negotiations between Lutheran Christians, not because they are opposed to unity, for all Christians must be willing to unite with others in so far as that is possible, but because they desire real agreement which must be based on spiritual unity, and spiritual unity seldom results from doctrinal negotiations.

By this we do not want to say that it is without benefit that thoughts are mutually exchanged and truths tried, truths of practical value for the Christian life of the individual and the congregation. We believe in the benefit of discussing questions and matters regarding which it is possible for men to reach bottom and regarding which there ought not be disagreement among Christians. New ideas, new truths, teachings that arise from history and that require new elucidation because of the demands that the times place upon us, and the congregation's (and church's) relations to and duties towards society. About this and like things there should be a lively exchange of thoughts among Christians, but they need not be church divisive unless people actually desire them to be so.

We are of the opinion that a higher unity ought and could be found that lets differences be differences, and that unity should be attained in that which in the last analysis makes us Christians. We believe in an exchange of thoughts, and a wrestle of principles (principsbrytning).

## WHAT IS THE STRIFE ABOUT AT PRESENT?

So far as we can understand it concerns, in the first place, some thing that is called, The Question of Scripture (Skriftsporgsmaalet). That sounds important but in reality it aims at an agreement regarding a theory of inspiration which is called verbal inspiration. But the question of Scripture is much greater than a certain theory of inspiration. The real question of Scripture asks, we take it, in how far one believes that the Scriptures are of divine origin, hence if it in reality is a revelation.

That Scripture actually is revelation, is believed by all who wish to be called Christians, but not all Christians agree about that which is called the verbal inspiration. And they never will be agreed about that, because that is a matter in which it is impossible to reach bottom.

Students of Scripture are more and more getting away from the theory of verbal inspiration, a theory which has brought more confusion among Christians than perhaps anything else. It is an impossibility to imagine that the Prophets and Apostles could have intended that their words should be considered as a dictation by the Holy Spirit and that they as almost unconscious automatons were the Holy Spirit's pencils. When a subjective theory is elevated to the status of an objective primary truth, then hubbub (virvar) surely will ensue in the church. And that has most certainly been the case.

The second point in controversy concerns certain aspects of conversion that touch upon the question of God's omniscience. It is called predestination. It is especially the Missouri Synod that keeps on with this. It is an old question, but it persists in coming up in doctrinal discussions, and agreement will never be reached, because it is impossible to fathom this doctrine no matter how cleverly or carefully the theses are formulated.

It is selfevidently necessary, or at least useful, to have some opinion regarding these questions, but the opinions may differ without depriving anyone of the right to be called Christians or to be counted as Lutheran brethren in faith.

In a federation such as the American Lutheran Conference, room must be given for such differences. Even in any given church body, room ought to be given them. This is done in the Lutheran Free-Church. One of the reasons why we stand as a separate church body, and must thus stand, is that we give room for differences of opinion on minor questions. This is a part of freedom. If the American Lutheran Conference is to be a **homogeneous** whole (of the same kind throughout) instead of a **conglomeration** (of different composition with a common bond) then we on our part have not had the right conception of it. (These foreign expressions should not be taken too literally, as they are not wholly adequate expressions for what we here have in mind, but they indicate briefly what we mean to say, and to say it in another way would require a lengthy explanation).

Nothing good comes from that unblessed hankering after uniformity.

It ought to be possible to work under a common tie.

A third matter about which strife is carried on is something called "unionism". This means that it is supposed to be forbidden to practice spiritual co-operation with any other Christian church with which one is not agreed in all these side issues, or which practices "unionism". There must be agreement in everything, they demand, in order that Christian brotherhood and altar and pulpit fellowship may be practiced.

This demand cannot be enforced, nor should effort be made to enforce it in the American Lutheran Conference. President Bersell, president of the Augustana Synod, set forth clearly that Synod's stand on this question at the Racine meeting. We are in agreement with Dr. Bersell in this. He said that the Augustana Synod practices pulpit and altar fellowship with the United Lutheran Church, a church which is not accorded membership in the American Lutheran Conference. The Augustana Synod's position is thus a breach of the homogeneous requirement. The Lutheran Free-Church takes exactly the same position in this respect as does the Augustana Synod.

This is not because the relation to the lodges for example is by us considered entirely immaterial, but because one must have that respect for another church body that one lets it decide its own concerns as best it may and wishes to, and because it would be presumptuous to endeavor to bring upon such a church ideas it is not ready for or does not consider of sufficient importance to deal with.

We believe that all the church bodies constituting the Conference, would grant the Missouri Synod membership without further ado and permit it to keep its characteristic opinions for itself but they (The American Lutheran Conference) would—presumably, and as we hope—not accede to the demands of the Missouri Synod in order to gain this Synod.

For that would be to sell out to the Missouri Synod.

It has been said that a church that speaks thus through its official organ cannot properly be called **Lutheran**. Yet the stark fact remains that it **does** bear the name "Lutheran", and that it is now affiliated with the American Lutheran Church in the American Lutheran Conference.



**The Bond** is the official organ of the Lutheran Brotherhood, a Life Insurance Company. Dr. P. O. Bersell, president of the Augustana Synod, is its associate editor. In its December issue **The Bond** carried the following editorial:

## THE AMERICAN LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

Lutheran Brotherhood is very much interested in every step taken by the Lutheran general bodies in America that will lead untimately to Lutheran unity. During the past two months three important church conventions have been held at which such steps have been taken.

At the biennial conventions of the American Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church the mutual exchange of inter-synodical greetings between these groups and the fraternal greetings of the Augustana Synod took on special significance. They were more than polite gestures. They indicated clearly a sincere desire for a closer unity. This was particularly evident when by special invitation President T. F. Gullixson of the American Lutheran Conference and President F. H. Knubel of the United Lutheran Church spoke to the Amer-

ican Lutheran Church convention, and President Poppen responded in the same vein. These addresses were the diagnosis of the heart throbs of two-thirds of the Lutherans in America.

The American Lutheran Conference, which held its fourth biennial convention in Racine, Wis., Nov. 9-11, also sounded an unmistakable note of Lutheran unity. President Gullixson spoke significantly of "Deepening Sympathies" in his convention sermon. That theme describes the experience of the five general bodies in this federation since its organization in Minneapolis in 1930. These bodies are The American Lutheran Church, The Norwegian Lutheran Church, The Augustana Synod, The Lutheran Free Church and the United Danish Church. Eight years of federated activities have brought them closer together in vital contacts that have indeed produced mutual sympathies that go deep.

Many of the delegates came to Racine with some misgivings because of the negotiations that have been going on for some time between the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod and which have now almost reached their successful culmination. It was felt by many that this might become an entering wedge to alienate the American Lutheran Church from the Conference and to set up an entirely new basis for American Lutheran unity, undoing to a large extent what the conference had thus far accomplished.

Happily, these fears were almost totally dissipated early in the convention. It was stated publicly by Dr. P. O. Bersell as the spokesman of the five general presidents that the negotiations between the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod had to do exclusively with agreements in regard to doctrine and practice, on the basis of which pulpit and altar fellowship could be established, and were, therefore, positively in line with the Des Moines resolution of the Conference which reads: "The American Lutheran Conference respectfully recommends and urges the selection of committees on Fellowship by the respective constituent bodies to initiate conferences with other Lutheran bodies relative to fellowship and to deal with similar commissions elected by other Lutheran bodies."

The general presidents, on the basis of the assurance given by President Poppen of the American Lutheran Church that its loyalty to the American Lutheran Conference had not been weakened by the pending negotiations and that this loyalty would always come first, stated as their consensus that the negotiations of the American Lutheran Church with both the Missouri Synod and the United Lutheran Church



indicated commendable progress in the direction of Lutheran unity. And in order that such negotiations may be given further impetus and scope the committee of general presidents introduced a series of resolutions, the chief item of which was the creation by the Conference itself of a Commission on Lutheran Church Unity to make it possible for the Conference as a unit to enter more efficaciously into this field of endeavor. The Commission will consist of the five general presidents and two elected members of each general body, with President N. C. Carlsen of the United Danish Church acting as the convener. The American Lutheran Conference has by this action made itself a more powerful unifying agency in American Lutheranism. This bodes well for the future.

One of the outstanding events of the convention was the public installation of Pastor Frederik A. Schiotz as Student Service Secretary of the Conference. He is the first full-time secretary or officer in the service of the conference. His work and that of his associates will demonstrate the value and even the necessity of unified effort and genuine cooperation in this field and will undoubtedly point the way to similar efforts in other important common endeavors.

The Bond felicitates the retiring president of the Conference, Dr. T. F. Gullixson, on his splendid four-year service as president of the Conference. He was a sympathetic, resourceful leader during these crucial years of severe testing of both the spirit and the framework of the Conference. We wish his successor, Dr. E. E. Ryden, a large measure of success in leading the Conference on to an even larger usefulness in American Lutheranism.

Can anyone fail to see in the above the subtle workings of unionism? To us it is exposed as clearly as a spider's web in the morning dew.

The U. L. C. A. is fundamentally un-Lutheran in doctrine and practice in spite of continued admonitions over a long period of years, as every reader of the Lutheran Witness well knows and yet the St. Louis Convention resolved:

"That according to the Scriptural injunction 1 Pet. 3:15 ("Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you") and in the interest of Christian union with all those who are agreed in the doctrines of our Lutheran faith, Synod declare itself willing and ready to continue such conferences through its committee and on the basis of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions if the representatives of the U. L. C. A. are ready to continue them." (St. Louis 1938 Report, p. 233.)

Do not the present circumstances with the dangers which accompany them demand that we seek the safety our merciful God has provided: Rom. 16, 17, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them," and Titus 3, 10, "A man that is an heretic, after the first and the second admonition reject." There is a time, dear Brethren, when the most effective "answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3, 15) is to mark, avoid, and reject error and errorists in faithful observance of God's own bidding.

Fraternally yours,

Chr. Anderson

Norman A. Madson

H. M. Tjernagel

S. C. Ylvisaker

Committee.

## **Please Note**

Emphasis in bold face type throughout  
II is ours.

Emphasis in "Folkeblad" editorial by  
writer.

The editorials in III should be in quo-  
tation marks.